is monitoring the prices with a view to ensuring price stability through such measures as are feasible and necessary.

High heavy metal content in herbs exported

295. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian herbal exports often face rejection on grounds of high heavy metal content and the presence of other unwanted ingredients; and

(b) if so, the details of action taken by Government to prevent such rejection due to high heavy metal content?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) Occasionally herbal products have faced rejections due to heavy metal levels being higher than the pharmacopoeia limits. Ayurvedic Siddha and Unani (ASU) medicinal herbal products may naturally contain purified metals as ingredients and such products need to be assessed differently due to fact that the presence of these minerals and metals contribute to the therapeutic efficacy as prescribed in the Ancient pharmacopoeia of ASU products.

Government of India has initiated awareness programmes for educating the industry through its Export Promotion Council, Pharmexcil. Besides, Government has introduced mandatory testing of metals in all purely herbal ASU medicines for exports w.e.f. 01.01.2006 onwards. Testing facilities for ASU drugs in the country have been strengthened by upgradation of State Drug Testing Laboratories and accreditation of private drug testing laboratories.

Trade with Gulf, Western Asian and African countries

†296. SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the extent of trade carried out by the country with the Gulf, West Asian and African countries;

(b) whether Government propose to hold talks with Gulf Co-operation Council on Free Trade Agreement and with West Asian and African countries on Investment Promotion Agreements; and

(c) if so, the details of the benefits derived as a result of these agreements?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) Total trade carried out by the country with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, West Asian and African countries, during 2006-07 was (Source-DGCIS)

(i)	African countries	:	US $ 24988.25 mn.
(ii)	West Asian countries (excluding GCC countries)	:	US $ 21624.45 mn.
(iii)	Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries; Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE	:	US $ 47361.88 mn.

(b) and (c) First round of negotiations with Gulf Cooperation Council on Free Trade Agreement was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on 21-22 March, 2006. The response of GCC Secretariat for convening the 2nd round of negotiations is being awaited. Government has signed bilateral investment promotion and production agreement with Sri Lanka. The agreement has

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.